

NPIC/D-162-70

21 MAY 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT : Security and Safety -- NPIC vs USGS

1. Attached is a copy of a report, prepared by the NPIC security staff, about a small fire which occurred in that area of [redacted] occupied by the U. S. Geological Survey. The report describes the circumstances of the fire and the actions various people took -- and did not take -- when the fire was discovered.

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2. This incident is one example of a condition affecting security and safety, which causes me considerable uneasiness but which is resistant to corrective measures. In essence, NPIC and USGS -- because they are separately administered functions occupying compartmented portions of the same building -- are dangerous one to the other.

3. This incident illustrates that a fire could happen in the USGS area and affect the NPIC area before an evacuation warning had been given to the NPIC area. Another recent incident illustrated that some degree of such danger to the USGS area exists if the fire were to start in the NPIC area, although I am more confident that our system would, in those circumstances, cause USGS to be evacuated in time.

4. The greatest danger to people in either case would be from smoke, not flame. The fact that most of the NPIC area lacks windows increases our concern about the smoke danger, whether a fire occurs in the NPIC area or encroaches upon that area from the USGS offices.

5. We are taking every measure within our powers of authority and persuasion to reduce such dangers. But, as long as NPIC and USGS occupy the same structure NPIC will lack security and safety integrity.

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Declass Review by NIMA/DOD

[redacted]  
Executive Director  
National Photographic Interpretation Center

Attachment:  
a/s

cc: Director of Logistics  
Director of Security

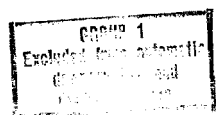
Distribution:  
Original & 1 - Addressee

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NPIC/ODIR: [redacted]

(20 May 70)

1 - NPIC/TSSG/SSD  
2 - NPIC/ODIR



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FIRE INVESTIGATION

DATE AND TIME : 6 January 1970, 1040 hours  
AREA : U. S. Geological Survey, Department of  
Interior, Sixth Floor, [REDACTED]  
CAUSE : Paper ignited in Dennison Copier machine  
ESTIMATED DAMAGE: Cost of replacing machine

INVESTIGATED BY : [REDACTED] Safety Officer  
[REDACTED] Safety Officer

SUMMARY

1. On 6 January 1970 at approximately 1040 hours, USSP [REDACTED] who was assigned to the NPIC parking lot post, advised [REDACTED] NPIC Security Officer, of a fire reported in the sixth floor offices of U. S. Geological Survey (USGS). Officer [REDACTED] said someone from USGS had called him requesting that fire equipment, which was enroute, be directed to the sixth floor USGS center. [REDACTED] immediately departed the NPIC Security Center to open the security gate on the roof of [REDACTED] should firemen need to enter the USGS center by this route.

2. Messrs. [REDACTED] NPIC Security Officer, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Safety Officers, left the NPIC Security Center to investigate the source of the fire. USGS employees had already evacuated their offices and were scattered about the parking lot in groups and fire equipment was on the scene. Firemen with respirator equipment were seen using the elevator for entry to the USGS offices. [REDACTED] USGS employee, was overheard explaining to firemen that the trouble was in a Dennison copying machine which was on fire. [REDACTED] entered the USGS office center along with the firemen to determine whether or not [REDACTED] was endangered and if employees should be evacuated. Mr. [REDACTED] later communicated by portable radio with the NPIC Control Center to advise that the fire had been extinguished and there was

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25X1 no need for evacuation of [ ] personnel. He said foremen were presently clearing the USGS area with smoke ejector equipment and mopping up the water.

25X1 3. The fire was reported at 1040 by [ ] Chief, USGS, to the [ ] guard office by the internal fire alarm pull system. This system when activated transmits a fire pre-signal to the USSP console center where a direct fire response alarm can be triggered by the on-duty guard for fire department assistance. The fire alarm pull box was reset at 1052 by the Navy Yard Fire Chief.

GENERAL

25X1 1. Approximately 120 employees are located in the sixth floor suite of offices maintained by the U. S. Geological Survey Mission, Department of Interior at [ ] Chemical analysis of rocks and testing for radioactive characteristics is the primary mission of the USGS facility. Work space limitations and lack of storage facilities create additional hazards on the sixth floor. The Safety Staff at a meeting during July 1969 discussed poor housekeeping in the storage of flammable solvents and open storage of noncompatible and poisonous chemicals with [ ] Department of Interior Safety Officers. [ ] expressed concern on whether or not the USGS operation created additional fire hazards to [ ] and he advised [ ] Safety Officer, that he would assign [ ] Department of Interior Safety Officer, to conduct an official survey of the USGS facility [ ]

25X1 2. The Safety Staff in making a visual inspection of the room after the fire was extinguished noted five one-gallon jugs of ammonia hydroxide and two gallons of duplicating fluid stored within five feet of the burned out copying machine. A fire detection dome was not properly positioned in the reproduction area to immediately give an alarm of fire. The USGS office area is provided with a ventilating system independent of the NPIC complex; therefore, no smoke from the fire was evidenced by NPIC personnel within their respective work areas. Firemen mistakenly started their smoke ejection equipment with the exhusting vent inverted which proceeded to blow smoke back into the USGS office areas. However, once the smoke ejector was properly mounted, the area started to clear.

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3. There are also three other emergency exits available to USGS personnel on the sixth floor. Two emergency roof exits are located at the north and south ends of the USGS area and one east side emergency exit leads to an outside stair ladder.

DETAILS OF INVESTIGATION

Interview: [ ] USGS employee

1. [ ] stated she had been using the Dennison copier, and while it was operating on its automatic setting, she returned to her desk to answer a fellow employee's question. When she returned to the machine there was heavy smoke and flame coming from the copier. She stated she retained her composure enough to pull the electrical plug before calling for assistance. [ ]

[ ] had attempted to assist by removing the inner storm window and breaking the outer glass from the metal casement window to facilitate dropping the flexible tubing for the USGS toxic fume ventilator to the outside of the building. The flexible tubing was pinched in the process and did not properly expel the smoke from the area. [ ] was severely cut on his hand while performing this function and consequently was not available for interview inasmuch as he was taken to a doctor's office for attention.

2. [ ] meanwhile dialed the emergency telephone number listed for the fire department to report the incident. She then called Officer [ ] at the main gate to request that the fire department be directed to the USGS offices. [ ] made the initial report of this incident to the NPIC Security Office.

3. [ ] advised she did not pull the internal fire alarm system because she did not have her glasses on and the pull box located half a corridor away would not have been visible enough for her to function the unit. [ ] reiterated several times she was aware or knowledgeable of the emergency procedures set forth in the memorandum from the NPIC Security Staff. Several USGS employees expressed a complete lack of knowledge in having seen this emergency procedure paper. [ ] continued that [ ] USGS chemist, who was also unavailable for interview, responded and attempted to extinguish the smoldering

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25X1 fire with CO<sub>2</sub> fire extinguishers. The fire was extinguished by  
25X1 [ ] a USGS employee, utilizing two 10 lb CO<sub>2</sub> extinguishers.  
Firemen used a 1 1/2 inch water hose to saturate and cool the  
smoldering wires in the machine to prevent a reflash.

25X1 Interview: USSP [ ]

25X1 Officer [ ] said he received an alarm signal on the  
control console approximately seven minutes after Officer [ ]  
initially reported the fire to Security. Due to the fire alarm cir-  
cuitry arrangement on the sixth floor there is no way to differentiate  
between automatic and manual alarms in this area. 25X1

25X1 Interview: [ ] Security Duty Officer

25X1 [ ] stated he received notification of a fire  
25X1 at [ ] from the GSA Control Center. The GSA Duty Officer  
related that fire equipment was enroute to render assistance at  
25X1 [ ] called the NPIC Security Office for informa-  
tion but was advised that the fire was in the USGS area and Head-  
quarters would be contacted when more details on the incident were  
25X1 known. [ ] then followed through by notifying the Safety  
25X1 Staff of the incident at [ ]

25X1 Interview: [ ] Department of Interior

25X1 On Thursday, 8 January 1970, [ ] telephoned  
25X1 [ ] Department of Interior, Protection Division. When  
25X1 queried about the USGS fire, [ ] stated he had just heard about  
25X1 the incident from [ ] USGS Safety Officer designee,  
25X1 but he had not received any details on what had caused the fire or  
any relative information. [ ] was briefed on facts of the  
incident which could have caused more severe repercussions if  
chemicals stored nearby had become involved in the fire. [ ]  
25X1 expressed his concern and stated he was being replaced in his present  
job some time that week but he would surely follow through with  
25X1 [ ] on the incident. His replacement, who had not been  
named at that time, would be properly briefed on the incident by  
25X1 [ ] before he vacated the job. Furthermore, he advised he  
25X1 had been unable to send [ ] Department of Interior Safety  
Officer, to survey the USGS complex at [ ] 25X1

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was still stationed in Denver, Colorado. He did recall meeting with the Safety Staff in July 1969 wherein he was apprised of unsafe conditions existing at the USGS center.

25X1 Interview: [ ] USGS employee

25X1 [ ] extinguished the fire by using two CO<sub>2</sub> extinguishers. A toxic fume ejector, previously constructed by USGS employees, was utilized in an attempt to eject the smoke.

### CONCLUSION

1. The fire in the Dennison copier is attributed to a faulty paper feed mechanism which allowed paper to become clogged at the light source where heat subsequently ignited the paper. Flame was transmitted into the electrical wiring of the unit which provided additional fuel to support the fire.

2. Containers of duplicating fluid and ammonium hydroxide situated nearby would have created additional hazards for USGS personnel and fire fighting units if the fire had gone unchecked. Duplicating fluid has a low flash point and is rated as a flammable solvent. Ammonium hydroxide (acqua ammonia) has the following characteristics:

a. Anhydrous ammonia is a strong irritating chemical to the skin, mucous membrane, respiratory tract and eyes. Direct exposure by contact can cause severe burns.

b. Although fire and explosion hazards are not great, the gas is flammable in high concentrations, particularly in the presence of combustible material or oxygen and oil. When thus confined, explosions may follow particularly at elevated temperatures and high pressures.

c. Even weak solutions of ammonia cause hazards in three ways: first, by the inhalation of gaseous ammonia; second, by eye or skin contact;

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and third, by oral intake. The degree of danger in each case is proportional to the strength of the ammonium hydroxide solution.

3. NPIC emergency personnel were belatedly notified of the fire because USGS employees felt they could adequately extinguish the fire. The fire department was called to expel the intense smoke and eliminate a possible reflash of fire within the machine. USGS employees were negligent in delaying activation of the building's manual fire alarm.

4. The USGS toxic fume ventilator was inadequate in expelling smoke from the area. This particular unit is not a smoke ejector as it was custom built by USGS to ventilate toxic chemical fumes.

5. The roof emergency exits were open and could have been used for bringing the firemen into the area should the USGS stairwell and elevator from the ground floor level have been inoperative.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that GSA arrange for a survey of the present USGS fire detection system to establish that each area is properly covered.

2. It is also recommended that GSA arrange for a survey of all flammable solvents and dangerous chemicals to insure they are stored in accordance with safety standards.

3. It is recommended that the present toxic fume ventilator be supplemented with newer equipment to provide a more positive exhausting of smoke or dangerous chemical fumes from the USGS laboratories in case of accidents dealing with these agents.

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